

authorization pursuant to Section 7 of the Natural Gas Act.

Linwood A. Watson, Jr.,

Acting Secretary.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Project No. 346-MN]

Minnesota Power, Inc.; Notice of Minnesota Power, Inc.'s Request for Waiver and To Use Alternative Procedures in Filing a License Application

September 29, 1998.

On September 21, 1998, the existing licensee, Minnesota Power, Inc. (Minnesota Power), filed a request to waive certain Commission regulations and to use alternative procedures for submitting an application for new license for the existing Blanchard Hydroelectric Project No. 346. The project is located on the Mississippi River, in Morrison County, Minnesota, and consists of 750-foot-long, 45-foot-high concrete gravity dam with an integral powerhouse, and 1,152-acre reservoir, three generating units with a total installed capacity of 18 MW, and appurtenant facilities.

Minnesota Power has demonstrated that it has made an effort to contact all resource agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other affected by the proposal, and that a consensus exists that the use of alternative procedures is appropriate in this case. Further, waiving the Commission's regulations will be automatic upon approval of the alternative procedures stipulated in Order No. 596.¹

Minnesota Power has submitted a communications protocol that is supported by the interested entities.

The purpose of this notice is to invite any additional comments on Minnesota Power's request to use the alternative procedures, pursuant to Section 4.34(i) of the Commission's regulations. Additional notices seeking comments on the specific project proposal, interventions and protests, and recommended terms and conditions will be issued at a later date.

The alternative procedures being requested here combine the prefilings consultation process with the environmental review process, allowing Minnesota Power to complete and file

an Environmental Assessment (EA) in lieu of Exhibit E of the license application. This differs from the traditional process, in which an applicant consults with agencies, Indian tribes, and NGOs during preparation of the application for the license and before filing it, but the Commission staff performs the environmental review after the application is filed. The alternative procedures are intended to simplify and expedite the licensing process by combining the prefilings consultation and environmental review processes into a single process, to facilitate greater participation, and to improve communication and cooperation among the participants.

Applicant Prepared EA Process and Blanchard Project Schedule

Minnesota Power has met with state and federal resource agencies, and NGOs regarding the Blanchard Hydroelectric Project. Minnesota Power has submitted a proposed schedule for the alternative procedures that leads to the filing of a license application by August 2001.

Comments

Interested parties have 30 days from the date of this notice to file with the Commission, any comments on Minnesota Power's proposal to use the alternative procedures to file an application for the Blanchard Hydroelectric Project.

Filing Requirements

The comments must be filed by providing an original and 8 copies as required by the Commission's regulations to: Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Office of the Secretary, Dockets—Room 1A, 888 First Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20426.

All comment filings must bear the heading "Comments on the Alternative Procedures," and include the project name and number (Blanchard Hydroelectric Project No. 346).

For further information on this process, please call Tom Dean of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission at 202-219-2778.

Linwood A. Watson, Jr.,

Acting Secretary.

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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Docket No. RP96-331-009]

National Fuel Gas Supply Corporation; Notice of Proposed Changes in FERC Gas Tariff

September 29, 1998.

Take notice that on September 15, 1998, National Fuel Gas Supply Corporation (National Fuel) tendered for filing as part of its FERC Gas Tariff, Fourth Revised Volume No. 1, First Revised Sheet No. 12, to be effective November 1, 1998.

National Fuel states that the filing is made to implement two firm storage agreements between National Fuel and National Fuel Resources, Inc. (NFR) and one firm storage agreement between National Fuel and Engage U.S., L.P. (Engage). National Fuel states that each of these agreements provides for negotiated rates pursuant to GT&C Section 17.2 of National Fuel's tariff and the Commission's policy regarding negotiated rates. National Fuels states that under its agreements with NFR and Engage, firm storage service would be provided under its FSS Rate Schedule at a formula rate based upon the difference between the price of gas at Niagara, as published by *Gas Daily*, applicable at the time of injection, and such price applicable at the time of withdrawal. The specific formula is set forth in the amendments to the agreements, which accompany National Fuel's tariff filing.

National Fuel states that it is serving copies of the filing upon its firm customers, interested state commissions and on all interruptible customers.

Any person desiring to protest this filing should file a protest with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street, NE., Washington, DC 20426, in accordance with Section 385.211 of the Commission's Rules and Regulations. All such protests must be filed on or before October 5, 1998. Protests will be considered by the Commission in determining the appropriate action to be taken, but will not serve to make protestants parties to the proceedings. Copies of this filing are on file with the Commission and are available for public inspection in the Public Reference Room.

Linwood A. Watson, Jr.,

Acting Secretary.

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¹ Order No. 596, Regulations for the Licensing of Hydroelectric Projects, 81 FERC ¶ 61,103 (1997).